

Commissioners

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Mr. Omar Benjamin

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Lieutenant Governor John Garamendi

Lieutenant Governor John Garamendi served in the State Assembly from 1974-1976 and in the State Senate from 1976-1990, including a term as Senate Majority Leader. He became California's first elected Insurance Commissioner, serving from 1991-1995, then was appointed by President Bill Clinton as the Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior from 1995-1998. He returned to the California Department of Insurance in 2003, after his reelection as Insurance Commissioner. Lt. Governor Garamendi was elected as Lieutenant Governor in November 2006.

Mr. Hector Barreto

Mr. Barreto, of San Juan Capistrano, has served as president for Barreto Associates and chair for the Latino Coalition since 2006. From 2001 to 2006, he served as the administrator for the U.S. Small Business Administration. Previously, Mr. Barreto was president and owner of Barreto Financial Services from 1995 to 2001 and held the same position for Barreto Insurance and Financial Services from 1986 to 2001. He is past chair for the Latin Business Association and past vice chair for the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Omar Benjamin

Mr. Benjamin, of Oakland, has served as executive director for the Port of Oakland since February 2007. He previously was deputy executive director and director of commercial real estate for the Port of Oakland from 1997 to 2007. Prior to that, Mr. Benjamin served as chief operating officer for the real estate development company Al Anwa USA from 1995 to 1996. He is a member of the Oakland Economic Development Corporation.

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Ms. Virginia Chang Kiraly

Ms. Chang Kiraly, of Menlo Park, has owned Knitting Girls since 2004. She previously was a senior director for the Nasdaq Stock Market from 2000 to 2002 and an investment executive for Paine Webber from 1995 to 2000. Prior to that, Ms. Chang Kiraly was a sales associate for institutional fixed income sales and trading for Bear, Stearns & Company from 1993 to 1994 and an account executive for Alex Brown & Sons from 1991 to 1993. She is a member of the Asia America Multitechnology Association (AAMA) and Las Lomas Education Foundation. She is also past president of the Las Lomas PTA Executive Board.

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Mr. David Crane

Mr. Crane, of San Francisco, has served as special advisor to the Governor for jobs and economic growth since 2004. Before joining the Administration, he was a partner with Babcock & Brown, a financial services firm, from 1979 to 2003. Mr. Crane is a member of the High Speed Rail Authority and is an advisory trustee for Environmental Defense.

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Mr. Daniel Curtin

Mr. Curtin, of Sacramento, has served as director for the California Conference of Carpenters since 2001 and previously held the same position from 1992 to 1999. From 1999 to 2001, he served as chief deputy director for the Department of Industrial Relations. Prior to that, Mr. Curtin was a legislative advocate for the California Conference of Carpenters from 1987 to 1992.

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Senator Robert Dutton

Sen. Bob Dutton was elected to represent the 31st Senate District in November 2004. He was sworn into office on Dec. 6, 2004 after serving two years in the California State Assembly representing the 63rd District. Senator Dutton received nearly 60 percent of the vote in the sprawling 31st Senate District that includes portions of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties.

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Ms. Forescee Hogan-Rowles

Ms. Hogan-Rowles, of Los Angeles, has served as president and chief executive officer for the Community Financial Resource Center since 1995. She previously was executive director for Westview Economic Development Strategies from 1993 to 1995 and held the same position for the Coalition for Women's Economic Development (CWED) from 1990 to 1993. Ms. Hogan-Rowles was an instructor at Brooks College from 1985 to 1990 and owned Forescee-M & Company, also known as Flips, from 1981 to 1985. She is a member of the Opportunity Finance Network and the California Association of Microenterprise Opportunity.

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Senator Michael Machado

In November 2004, Senator Machado was re-elected to represent the Fifth Senate District, which includes the cities of Tracy, Manteca and Stockton in San Joaquin County; Suisun City, Fairfield, Dixon and Vacaville in Solano County; Davis, West Sacramento, Winters and Woodland in Yolo County; as well as Walnut Grove and a portion of Elk Grove in Sacramento County. Prior to his election to the Senate, he represented the 17th Assembly District from 1994 to 2000. Senator Machado currently chairs the Senate Committee on Revenue and Taxation and the Sub-Committee on Delta Resources. He also serves on the Senate Committees on Budget and Fiscal Review, Local Government, Natural Resources and Water, and Transportation and Housing. Additionally, he is a member of the Select Committees on the California Correctional System.

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Ambassador Thomas Nassif

Mr. Nassif, of Irvine, has served as president and chief executive officer for the Western Growers Association since 2002. From 2001 to 2002, he was founding and managing partner for Aequitas International Consulting. Previously, Mr. Nassif served as president and chief executive officer for the Los Alamos Land Company from 1994 to 2001 and chair for Gulf Interstate Engineering from 1988 to 1994. Prior to that, he served as a U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Morocco

from 1985 to 1988. Mr. Nassif served in the U.S. Army from 1961 to 1969.

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Assemblymember Lori Saldaña

Lori Saldaña was re-elected in 2006 to a second term in the California Legislature, representing the state's 76th Assembly District. Her district consists of the central and northern portion of San Diego, including the communities of Clairemont, Bay Park, Pacific Beach, Ocean Beach, Point Loma, Tierra Santa, Serra Mesa, Hillcrest, University Heights, North Park, South Park, Linda Vista, Mission Valley, City Heights, Old Town, Normal Heights, Mission Hills and Downtown San Diego.

Since elected to the California State Legislature in November of 2004, Assemblymember Saldaña was appointed to Leadership as the Assistant Majority Whip, a position she continues to hold. In 2006, she was appointed as Chair of the Housing and Community Development Committee and tasked with dispensing voter approved bonds for the state of California in excess of 2.85 billion dollars. Assemblymember Saldaña's additional assignments include Elections and Redistricting, Local Government, Natural Resources and Veteran's Affairs Committees. These committee assignments reflect her life long passions for protecting the environment, improving water quality and providing fair affordable housing in California.

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Mr. Demos Vardiabasis, Ph.D.

Professor Vardiabasis, of Downey, has served as an independent consultant for several companies including Baxter Healthcare, Northwest Airlines, ICTS Europe, Edison Utilities and Northgate Supermarkets since 1988. He has also been a professor of economics at Pepperdine University since 1983 and is the chair of the committee that oversees the Presidential Key Executive MBA Program at Pepperdine University's Graziadio School of Business and Management. From 1995 to 1997, Professor Vardiabasis served as chair and chief executive officer for IQ Now which he also founded. Previously, he was an assistant professor at California State University, Dominguez Hills from 1981 to 1983.

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Senator Leland Yee

After serving four years in the California State Assembly, Yee was elected to the State Senate in November 2006, garnering over 78 percent of the vote - the largest percentage for any Democratic candidate with a Republican challenger. Representing District 8, which includes San Francisco and San Mateo County, Senator Yee is the first Chinese American ever elected to the California State Senate and first Asian American elected to the Legislature's upper house in forty years. Senator Yee is also a member of the Senate Democratic Leadership as the Assistant President pro Tem.

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Aubry Stone

Aubry Stone has served as president and chief executive officer for the California Black Chamber of Commerce since 1994. Stone previously was a branch manager for Metropolitan Life from 1985 to 1994. He also served in the U.S. Air Force from 1962 to 1984 before retiring as superintendent of operations. Stone is a past member of the Sacramento Metro Chamber, Mayor's Economic Development Council and the Capitol Area Development Authority Board of Directors. This position does not require Senate confirmation and there is no salary. Stone is a Democrat.[back to top](#)

Ashley Swearengin

Ashley Swearengin has served as executive director for the Office of Community and Economic Development at California State University, Fresno since 2000. Swearengin has also served as chief operating officer of the Fresno Regional Jobs Initiative since 2003 and lead executive for the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley since 2006. Previously, she was director of the Central Valley Business Incubator from 1993 to 2000 and development coordinator for the law firm Baker, Manock & Jensen from 1995 to 1998. Prior to that, she was a client services representative for the law firm Jackson, Emerich, Pedreira & Nahigian from 1994 to 1995. Swearengin is a board member of the Fresno West Coalition for Economic Development Community Development Corporation, the Fresno Citizens for Good Government Board of Directors and the Fresno Business Council. This position does not require Senate confirmation and there is no salary. Swearengin is a Republican.[back to top](#)

Commission Staff

Mr. Richard D. Baum, Executive Director

Mr. Baum, of Mill Valley, served most recently as chief deputy insurance commissioner for the Department of Insurance. Previously, he was president and chief executive officer for the Care West Insurance Company from 1995 to 2003. Prior to that, Mr. Baum worked for the Department of Insurance from 1990 to 1995 holding the positions of chief deputy insurance commissioner then a trustee for the Executive Life Insurance Company. He also served as a senior executive at Amfac Incorporated from 1983 to 1990. Mr. Baum currently serves as director and chair of the governance committee for Redwood Trust. [back to top](#)

Ms. Michele Gault, Deputy Director

Ms. Gault, of Sacramento, served as the executive director for the Northern California World Trade Center in Sacramento from 2005-2007. Previously, she spent a year in Germany where she worked as a visiting professional in Munich at the Bavarian Ministry of Economics, and at Infineon Technologies. Prior to that, Ms. Gault worked for the State of California as the international project coordinator for California Business Investment Services (CalBIS). At the California Technology, Trade and Commerce Agency, she was the assistant director of the California State World Trade Commission and also served as the agency's trade policy analyst. She serves on the board of directors of the World Affairs Council of Sacramento. [back to top](#)